

The Project Return Program

Measuring Recidivism in
the Reintegration Program
for Ex-Offenders

**A Research Report by
the Metropolitan
Crime Commission**

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	5
Purpose of the Study.....	5
The Project Return Program.....	6
The Study	7
The Offenders.....	7
Data Collection.....	8
The Findings	8
Characteristics of Cohorts.....	8
Comparative Recidivism Rates.....	10
What Makes the Difference: Offender Characteristics or the Project Return Process?....	11
Other Research: Putting the Evaluation in Context	13
Studies of Recidivism Rates Among Ex-Offenders.....	13
What Types of Programs Work?.....	14
Conclusions and Recommendations	16
Why Is Project Return Successful and How Can It Be Improved?.....	16

Exhibits

Table One: Gender.....	8
Table Two: Age.....	9
Table Three: Frequency of Prior Offending.....	9
Table Four: Type of Prior Offending.....	9
Table Five: Prior Incarceration Time (months).....	9
Figure One: Recidivism Rates.....	10
Figure Two: Subsequent Offense Types (recidivists).....	11
Figure Three: Recidivism Rates (males only).....	12

Appendix A

Data Collection Instrument.....	19
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Appendix B

Table Six: Recidivism Rates.....	21
Table Seven: Subsequent Offense Type (Recidivists).....	21
Table Eight: Recidivism Rates (Males Only).....	21

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of the Study

This Metropolitan Crime Committee research report evaluates the effectiveness of Project Return in achieving its primary goal of reintegrating ex-offenders back into the community. It is the most recent in a series of reports issued by the Metropolitan Crime Commission addressing important justice system issues affecting the metropolitan area.

The increasing number of offenders being released from prisons following a decade of unprecedented prison population growth, the high recidivism rate, and the enormous cost of incarceration have led corrections professionals in Louisiana and across the country to establish programs that can reduce prison populations and lower recidivism by effectively reintegrating ex-offenders into the community.

Project Return, operating since 1994 under the aegis of Tulane University, is one such program. Project Return targets ex-offenders released or paroled from prison, and over the years has received a good deal of community-wide praise and support as an effective and sensible approach to reintegrating these individuals back into the community. However, Project Return has also been criticized in the media in recent months because the program lacks solid empirical evidence of its success. Proof of success thus far has been largely anecdotal. Project Return must demonstrate its viability both to the community and to funding sources in order to continue to provide services over the long term.

The Study

The Offenders

This study evaluates the performance of Project Return (PR) in terms of its success or failure in reducing the incidence of recidivism among its participants. Recidivism is generally defined as a relapse into criminal behavior. For the purpose of this study it refers to any incidence of re-conviction or re-incarceration.

The study population which is the focus of this report consists of past offenders living in the New Orleans area who served time in state confinement (an average of 2 years). With the exception of those individuals on whom information was incomplete, all participants in Project Return (both those who completed and did not complete the program) were included in the study. These two groups define the first two *cohorts* in the study (the PR Completers and the PR Non-completers). The third cohort consists of a sample of offenders released from confinement into the New Orleans community. The offenders in this third cohort did not participate in Project Return at all (Non-participants).
The Three Cohorts:

- PR Completers: Completed a three month Project Return class between January 1, 1994 and March 30, 1998
- PR Non-completers: Enrolled in, but did not complete, a Project Return class between January 1, 1994 and March 30, 1998
- Non-participants: Released from confinement between January 1, 1994 and March 30, 1998 but not enrolled in Project Return

In an effort to mirror the population of Project Return participants, the sample of non-participants was pulled from a list of offenders from the New Orleans area. The list was provided by the Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC) and consisted of all New Orleans area offenders released from state confinement between January 1994 and April 1998. This represents, roughly, the pool of offenders that provided Project Return with its participants during this period.

Data Collection

The data for all the offenders in this report were gathered in large part from the on-line databases of the Louisiana Department of Corrections (the CAJUN system) and the New Orleans Police Department's (NOPD) MOTION system. Reference data relevant to its participants was provided by Project Return. Reference data on the Non-participants was provided by the Department of Corrections.

An example of the data collection instrument used is found in Appendix A. This checklist was completed for every offender in the study. Not every offender was included in the final analysis. Due largely to either a lack of all the necessary reference information (date of birth, social security number, etc.) or mismatching reference information, not all offenders were found in the databases. Additionally, there were cases in which no evidence of confinement was found in the DOC database. In these instances, the offenders were not included in the final study.

The final study included the following number of offenders for each of the three cohorts:

- PR Completers: 298
- PR Non-completers: 270
- Non-participants: 288

THE FINDINGS

Characteristics of Cohorts

- Gender – there is a significantly higher percentage of women in the PR Completer (26.5 percent) and Non-completer (19.3 percent) groups than in the Non-participant group (7.3 percent). The probable explanation for this disparity is that Project Return staff are allowed to visit the prison for women at St. Gabriel to recruit participants, but are not allowed to recruit male DOC inmates on-site.
- Age – there is a statistically significant difference between the average age of the PR Completer group (35.8 years) and the Non-participant control group (32.3 years).
- Frequency of prior offending – there are no significant differences among the three groups regarding either average number of prior arrests (6) or convictions (3).
- Prior offense type – it should be noted that this represents the most serious prior offense for the individual, not necessarily the offense for which they were incarcerated during the study. The primary difference noted was that the PR Completer group committed more violent offenses and fewer property offenses as compared to the Non-completers and Non-participants.
- Prior time served – the differences in means are statistically significant, with PR Completers evidencing a longer length of commitment (42 months) than either PR Non-completers (33 months) or the Non-participants (27 months).

Comparative Recidivism Rates

The primary purpose of this research was to compare the recidivism rates of PR Completers with Non-completers and a control group of Non-participants, individuals who did not participate in Project Return. The three groups were tracked over a five-year period.

The PR Completer group evidenced lower rates of recidivism over all five years. These differences were statistically significant in all years except year five:

	PR Completer	PR Non-completer	Non-participant
Year One	10.7%	31.1%	37.2%
Year Two	24.4%	46.1%	51.0%
Year Three	30.6%	60.1%	54.9%
Year Four	35.9%	60.4%	61.4%
Year Five	50.8%	65.1%	69.1%

In addition to differing rates of recidivism among the cohorts, there was also a difference in the types of re-offending among recidivists in the three groups. The difference is statistically significant, with Non-participants exhibiting higher rates of parole violations (45.4%) as compared to the PR Completers (23.8%).

The high percentage of women in the PR Completer group did not contribute to the group's lower recidivism rate. While overall females were less likely to re-offend, among PR Completers, there was no difference between males and females in terms of their likelihood of recidivism.

Data analysis indicates that three factors are related to recidivism in the sample as a whole: cohort (which group they are in), prior convictions (more suggests a less favorable outcome) and age (older indicates a more favorable outcome). The data provide evidence of only one demographic factor – age – being a significant but not a determining factor in the success of the PR Completer group. All other prior offending patterns or basic demographic characteristics of this group are unrelated to the PR Completer's lower recidivism rate.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Project Return is an effective ex-offender reintegration program. The services provided to program participants enable them to make a more successful transition from prison to the community compared with similar ex-offenders who do not participate in or complete the program. Project Return also appears successful in reducing recidivism rates when compared with those for ex-offender populations nationwide. The recidivist rates in the studies reviewed as part of this evaluation ranged from 24 percent to 48 percent one year after release. The level of success achieved by Project Return is made even clearer when compared with a similar, highly regarded program. Individuals who completed Project Return recidivated at less than half the rate of the participants of this program during the first-year follow-up period.

Recommendations

- The rapid increase in the rate of recidivism over the five-year tracking period for those completing Project Returns suggests that many participants may require an extended period of program involvement in order to prevent future failure. For example, extended services could be delivered by way of a structured follow-up component that addresses current needs including re-employment, relapse prevention, drug/alcohol treatment, and educational/vocational needs.
- The dropout rate of 50 percent for Project Return is high and needs to be reduced. It is important because a higher completion rate would reduce the cost per participant, making the program more cost effective. Documenting the reasons that individuals do not complete the program through follow-up interviews might be helpful in this respect. Program staff suggest that increasing the hourly stipend (currently \$2.50) would substantially reduce the dropout rate.
- Women who complete Project Return and recidivate do so much more quickly than men – in 387 days versus 661 days. Identifying and addressing the gender-specific problems leading to early recidivism could reduce the overall failure rate and increase the completion rate for women. Early recidivism may be linked to the fact that women in the program are also more likely to be drug offenders than men.
- This evaluation did not include an assessment of the extent of substance abuse among program participants. But substance abuse is likely a significant cause of recidivism and may contribute to the high dropout rate as well. Drug violations were the most serious offense committed by one third of Project Return participants prior to their participation in the program. Strengthening the substance abuse component by improving linkages with existing service providers in the community could be a cost-effective strategy for lowering both the recidivism and the dropout rates.

INTRODUCTION

This Metropolitan Crime Committee research report evaluates the effectiveness of Project Return in achieving its primary goal of reintegrating ex-offenders back into the community. It is the most recent in a series of reports issued by the Metropolitan Crime Commission addressing important justice system issues affecting the metropolitan area.

Purpose of the Study

The rate of incarceration in the United States has increased dramatically over the past 25 years, growing from 100 people per 100,000 in 1972 to 450 per 100,000 in 1996, an increase of 350 percent. The bulk of this increase is due to sentencing reforms including mandatory minimum sentencing and “truth in sentencing” laws, both of which have led to longer prison terms. From 1980 to 1995, prison populations in the United States grew from 330,000 to over 1.5 million. A study by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) showed that in 1991, 45% of state prisoners nationwide were on probation or parole at the time they committed a new offense leading to their subsequent incarceration.

In Louisiana, the number of state prisoners in state and local facilities increased by 500 percent, from 7,500 in 1980 to over 36,000 in 1999. The fiscal impact of this enormous prison population growth is no less dramatic. Over the past four years alone, the state DOC budget has increased by 35 percent, from \$425 million (1996-97) to \$572 million in 1999-2000.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, a record 520,000 people left prisons in the United States in 1998, a 28 percent increase over 1990. An estimated 500,000 offenders were released in 1999, to be followed by another 500,000 in 2000. In Louisiana in 1999, 14,631 adult offenders were released from state custody, a 38 percent increase over the 1994 total of 10,637 releases.

This increasing number of offenders being released from prisons following decades of unprecedented prison population growth, the high recidivism rate, and the enormous cost of incarceration have led corrections professionals in Louisiana and across the country to establish programs that can reduce prison populations and lower recidivism by effectively reintegrating ex-offenders into the community. Project Return, operating since 1994 under the aegis of Tulane University, is one such program. Since its inception, Project Return has received a good deal of community-wide praise and support as an effective and sensible approach to reintegrating ex-offenders back into the community. The program model is also under serious consideration for replication in other cities. However, Project Return has also been criticized in the media because the program lacks solid empirical evidence of its success. Proof of success thus far has been largely anecdotal. But now, as critics and supporters alike call for hard data, Project Return must demonstrate its viability both to the community and to funding sources in order to continue to provide services over the long term.

The primary goal of this report is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Project Return program in its effort to assist former offenders in successfully re-entering the community. The program is evaluated in terms of its success or failure in reducing the incidence of recidivism among its participants. Recidivism is generally defined as a relapse into criminal behavior. For the purpose of this study it refers to any incidence of re-conviction or re-incarceration.

The Project Return Program

Project Return is a correctional aftercare program funded by a grant from the BJA and operating under the auspices of Tulane University since 1994. Project Return has an eighteen-member volunteer board of directors separate and apart from the university. The project is presently located in Algiers on the Westbank of Orleans Parish. It was previously located in downtown New Orleans. The operating budget for Project Return increased from \$375,000 in 1994 to \$775,000 in 1998, roughly the time period covered by the evaluation.

Project Return targets offenders released or paroled from prison. The stated goal of the program is to reduce the rate of recidivism among offenders exiting the state prison system by providing “integrated services” that include substance abuse and family counseling, educational services (including GED), conflict resolution, communication skills and job training and placement. Other goals include reduced costs for the criminal justice system through lower recidivism and crime reduction. The majority of program staff are ex-offenders. Based on information provided by Project Return staff, 85 percent of participants are African-American and 92 percent are high school dropouts reading at a sixth-grade level.

Participation in the program is voluntary. Recruiting participants for the program is accomplished mainly by “word of mouth.” However, the state prison for women in St. Gabriel allows Project Return staff to recruit participants on-site. Other state-run facilities do not allow program staff this privilege because of the prior criminal records of many Project Return staff members.

Project Return is designed to prepare participants for reintegration in the community and for employment. Participants receive a stipend of \$2.50 per hour during their period of participation that averages 33 hours per week over a three-month period. The following is a summary of the daily services provided to Project Return participants:

- **Employability skills and job placement** (4.5 hours per week) – Project Return has developed a network of private businesses that provide employment opportunities for program graduates. This program component is intended to prepare the participant for these employment opportunities. The participant’s work history and job skills are assessed in group and individual sessions. Session topics include goal setting, problem solving and handling interviews to build the individual’s confidence in his/her ability to get and hold a job. Participants receive hands-on computer literacy training as part of employability skills training. Services also include guest speakers, job-related reference material, group discussions and role-playing sessions.
- **Academic enhancement** (12 hours per week) – Instruction focuses on improving math, reading and writing skills using a computer-based instruction program designed for academically disadvantaged youth and adults. Integrated with the academic components of the instruction program are life skills and employability skills modules. The instruction program is designed to prepare participants to obtain a Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED).
- **Training in conflict resolution** (6 hours per week) – The psychosocial component of Project Return is based on the “community building” concept and on improving communication skills. This component initiates participants into the program through three mandatory “experiential” workshops. The purpose of this component is to enhance self-awareness, improve interpersonal and family relationships, and develop anger management skills, all of which, according to the program philosophy, are tools necessary to maintain employment and stay out of prison.

- **Addiction education** (8.5 hours per week) – A basic premise in the Project Return approach is that the great majority of ex-offenders have drug and alcohol problems that will lead to their re-incarceration if untreated. Participants receive education on the cultural, psychological, and scientific factors associated with addictive and compulsive behaviors. The focus of this component is relapse prevention and equipping participants to understand their addictive behaviors and to deal more effectively with friends, family and co-workers. Individuals are encouraged to participate in 12-step programs or are referred to in-patient care to treat their addiction.

THE STUDY

The Offenders

The study population consists of past offenders living in the New Orleans area who served an average of two years in state confinement. All participants in Project Return (both those who completed and did not complete the program) were included in the study. About 50 percent of those starting the Project Return program during the study period did not complete the program. These two groups define the first two *cohorts* in the study (the PR Completers and the PR Non-completers). The third cohort consists of a sample of offenders released from confinement into the New Orleans community. The offenders in this third cohort did not participate in Project Return at all (Non-participants or control group).

The Three Cohorts:

- PR Completers: Completed a three month Project Return class between January 1, 1994 and March 30, 1998
- PR Non-completers: Enrolled in, but did not complete, a Project Return class between January 1, 1994 and March 30, 1998
- Non-participants: Released from confinement between January 1, 1994 and March 30, 1998 but not enrolled in Project Return

In an effort to mirror the population of Project Return participants, the sample of non-participants was pulled from a list of offenders from the New Orleans area. The list was provided by the Louisiana Department of Corrections (DOC), and consisted of all New Orleans area offenders released from state confinement between January 1994 and April 1998. This represents, roughly, the pool of offenders that provided Project Return with its participants during this period.

Since all of the offenders in the study were tracked for incidence of recidivism up until the time of data collection, an effort was made to gather a sample of Non-participants who were released at different times throughout the four-year period of program operation prior to April 1998. Separate samples were collected for offenders released during each of the calendar years between 1994 and 1998. The sizes of these samples were based proportionally on the number of Project Return participants who entered the program in each year. This method insured that the study included roughly equivalent proportions of program participants and non-participants tracked for shorter and longer periods of time (anywhere from eighteen months to five years).

Data Collection

The data for all the offenders in this report were gathered in large part from the on-line databases of the Louisiana Department of Corrections (the CAJUN system) and the New Orleans Police Department's (NOPD) MOTION system. Reference data relevant to its participants was provided by Project Return. Reference data on the Non-participants was provided by the DOC.

An example of the data collection instrument used is found in Appendix A. This checklist was completed for every offender in the study. Not every offender was included in the final analysis. Due largely to either a lack of all the necessary reference information (date of birth, social security number, etc.) or mismatching reference information, not all offenders were found in the databases. Additionally, there were cases in which no evidence of confinement was found in the DOC database. In these instances, the offenders were not included in the final study.

The final study included the following number of offenders for each of the three cohorts:

- PR Completers: 298
- PR Non-completers: 270
- Non-participants: 288

Data collected for each of the three cohorts include basic descriptive data (age, gender), offending records (arrests, convictions, offense types) and incarceration records (length of incarceration, facility). The data provide for the generation of offender profiles (demographic description, offending patterns, incarceration histories) and recidivism tracking for each of the three cohorts.

As mentioned above, for the purpose of this report, recidivism is defined as a re-conviction or re-incarceration of the subject. Due to the longer tracking periods for some of the individuals in this study it was possible to perform an examination of recidivism over time. Recidivism rates were generated for each of the three cohorts after one year, two years, three years, four years and five years.

THE FINDINGS

Characteristics of Cohorts

Basic demographic information for each cohort is presented in **Tables One** through **Five**. As can be seen in **Table One**, proportionally there are significantly more women in the PR Completer and Non-completer groups (26.5 percent and 19.3 percent) than the in the Non-participant group (7.3 percent).

Table One: Gender

<i>Cohort</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
PR Completers	79 26.5%	219 73.5%
PR Non-completers	52 19.3%	218 80.7%
Non-participants	21 7.3%	267 92.7%

Source: MCC Research

Table Two: Age

Cohort	Average Age
PR Completers	35.8
PR Non-completers	33.1
Non-participants	32.3

Source: MCC Research

Table Two presents the average age for each group. PR Completers (35.8 years) are statistically significantly older than the Non-participant group (32.3 years) ($F_{(2,853)}=11.65, p<.000$). There are no differences among the three groups regarding either average number of arrests or average number of convictions (**Table Three**). The comparable arrest and conviction history of the three groups suggests that Project Return’s participants closely match the general ex-offender population in terms of seriousness of prior offending.

Table Three: Frequency of Prior Offending

Cohort	Avg. No. of Arrests	Avg. No. of Convictions
PR Completers	6.2	3.2
PR Non-completers	6.5	3.2
Non-participants	6.0	3.1

Source: MCC Research

Table Four: Type of Prior Offending

Cohort	N	Property	Violent	Drug	Weapons/ Other
PR Completers	298	22.1%	40.6%	33.9%	3.4%
PR Non-completers	270	32.6%	33.3%	30.4%	3.7%
Non-participants	288	34.4%	29.5%	30.2%	6.3%

Source: MCC Research

Table Four presents the breakdown of prior offense type for each group. It should be noted that this represents the most serious prior offense for the individual, not necessarily the offense for which they were incarcerated during the study. The primary difference was that the PR Completers committed more violent offenses (40.6 percent) and fewer property offenses (22.1 percent) as compared to the Non-completers and control group ($X^2_{(6)}=18.17, p<.006$). However, violent offenses made up only 5.9 percent of the most serious subsequent offenses committed by PR Completers who recidivated during the tracking period (see **Table Seven** in Appendix B).

Table Five: Prior Incarceration Time (months)

Cohort	N	Avg. No. of Months
PR Completers	273	42
PR Non-completers	248	33
Non-participants	288	27

Source: MCC Research

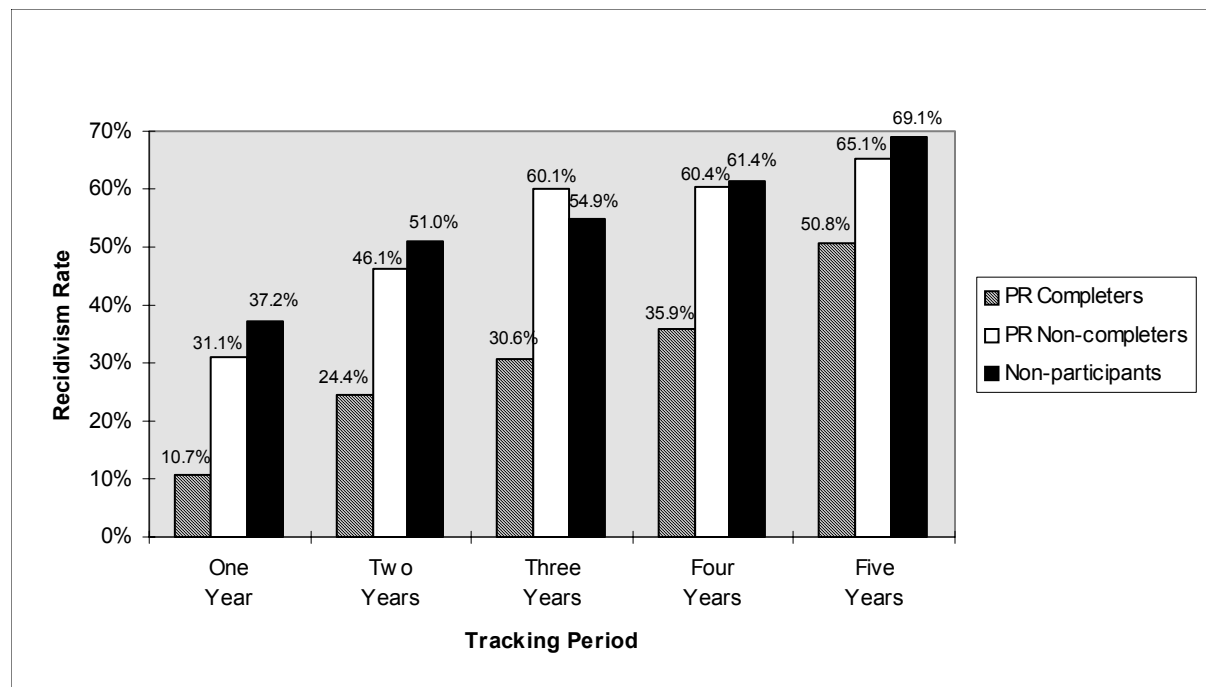
Table Five presents the average length of time served (in months) for each cohort. The differences in means are statistically significant, with PR Completers (42 months) evidencing a longer length of commitment than either PR Non-completers (33 months) or the control group (27 months). Non-completers did not differ significantly from the control group regarding time served.

Comparative Recidivism Rates

The primary purpose of this research was to compare the recidivism rates of PR Completers with Non-completers and a control group of Non-participants, individuals who did not participate in Project Return.

Table Six (see Appendix B) presents the comparative recidivism rates for each of the three cohorts over time, which is graphically represented in **Figure One**. These numbers refer to the offenders' contact with the justice system following their release from incarceration. The recidivism rate represents the percentage of offenders from each cohort that was re-convicted or re-incarcerated after the amount of time specified under *Tracking Period* in Table Six. In order to appear in Year Five, for example, an individual must have been tracked for the full five years. Individuals who re-offended but were not tracked for the full time specified were not included in each group.

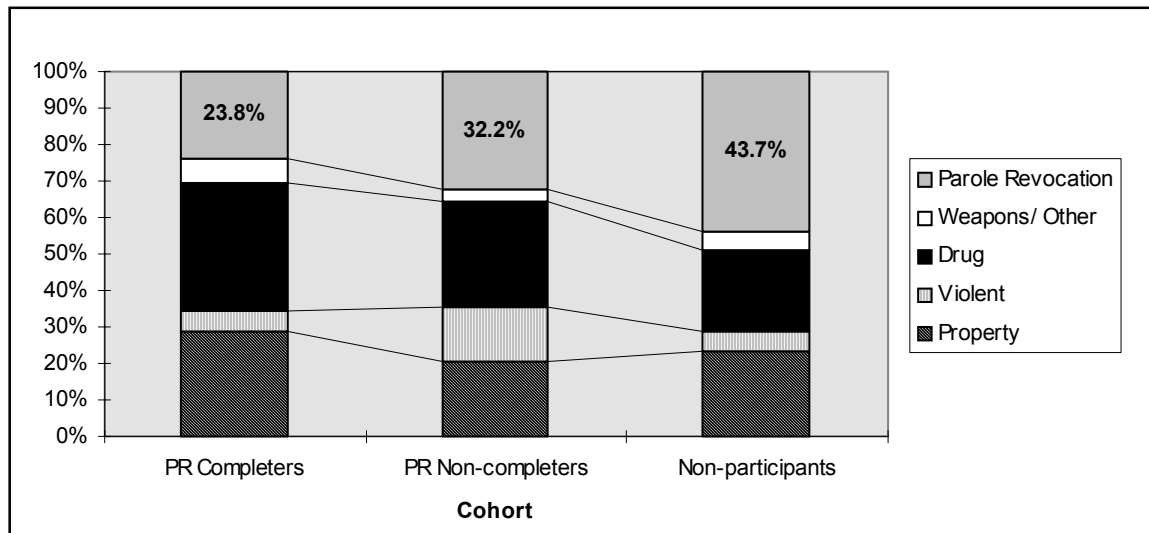
Figure One: Recidivism Rates



Source: MCC Research

As can be seen, PR Completers evidenced lower rates of recidivism in all years. These differences were statistically significant in all years except Year Five ($X^2_{(2)}=4.38, p<.12$), likely due to the small number of individuals tracked for five years. In Year One, the recidivism rate for Non-participants (37.2 percent) was over three times that of PR Completers (10.7 percent). In Year Two, the failure rate for the control group (51 percent) was double that of the PR Completer group (24.4 percent). **Figure One** shows that the difference in recidivism between the two groups narrows; and, as noted, by Year Five there is no statistical difference in the rates of recidivism. It appears that the positive impact of Project Return diminishes over time. PR Non-completers evidenced failure rates similar to those of the control group of Non-participants in all tracking periods.

Figure Two: Subsequent Offense Types (recidivists)



Source: MCC Research

In addition to differing rates of recidivism among the cohorts, there was also a difference in the types of recidivism. **Table Seven** (see Appendix B) presents data regarding the types of subsequent offending among the subjects, which is represented graphically in **Figure Two**. The difference among the cohorts is statistically significant, with Non-participants exhibiting significantly higher rates of parole violations (43.7 percent) as compared to the PR Completers (23.8 percent). Parole violation in this instance would include technical violations such as failure to report to the parole officer, positive drug tests, not maintaining employment, and failure to meet other parole conditions. It is unclear which services or combination of services provided by Project Return result in a lower rate of parole revocation among PR Completers.

What Makes the Difference: Offender Characteristics or the Project Return Process?

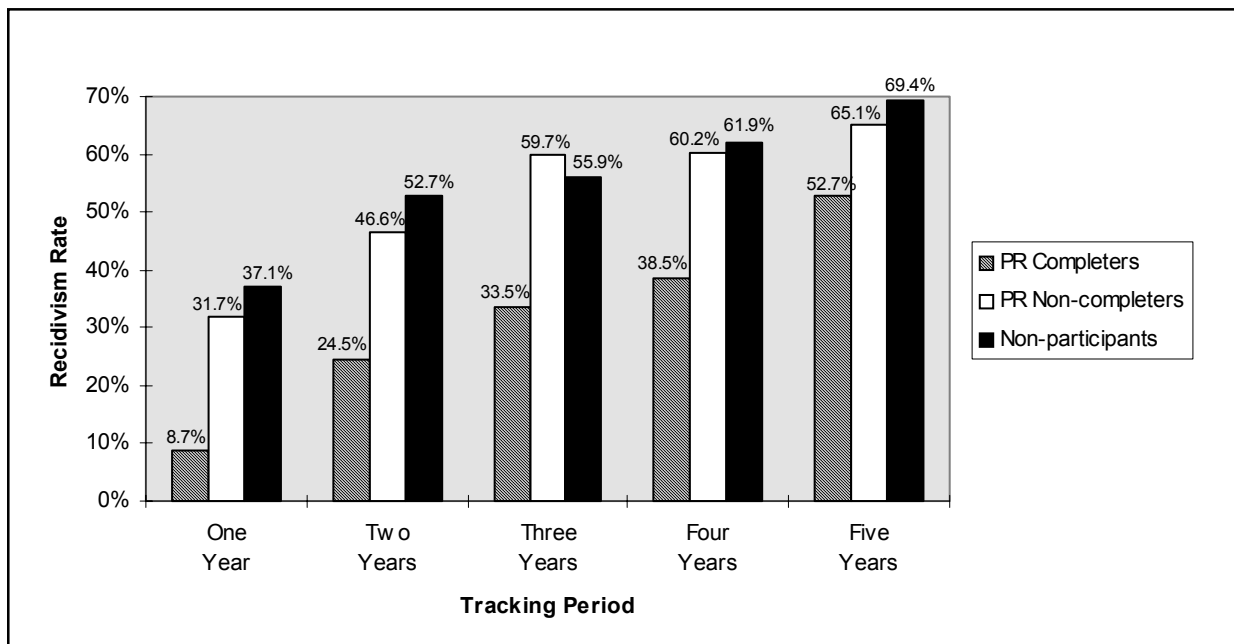
The data suggest that individuals completing the Project Return program are less likely to have subsequent contact with the law than either their Non-completing counterparts or Non-participants. One possible explanation for this difference is that the PR Completers differed in some systematic way from the Non-completers or control group. The analyses of demographic and criminologic data suggest that this is not the case. The methodology was carefully designed to prevent any systematic biases in the control group, although this was obviously not possible to control in the PR Non-completers. As such, the data indicate that the groups are fairly well matched. All three cohorts have comparable arrest and conviction histories. However, several demographic and criminological differences were found, which appear to be inter-related. The PR Completer cohort was found to contain more women, was on average older, had committed more violent offenses and had spent more time incarcerated. The latter two findings are likely related.

The possibility that the women may have artificially inflated the positive outcome of the Project Return completing cohort was explored. It is generally accepted that female offenders are less likely to re-offend than their male counterparts. The most likely reason for the higher percentage of female offenders among the program participants is the willingness on the part of St. Gabriel’s staff (a correctional facility housing female inmates) to work with Project Return.

Table Eight (see Appendix B) and **Figure Three** present the same recidivism data that are presented in the initial table except that the data in this table are for males only. If the higher percentage of females among the PR Completers was influencing the recidivism rates, it would be expected that examining only the male offenders would show more equivalent recidivism rates among the cohorts. This is not the case. When comparing **Figure Three** to **Figure One** there is almost no change in the trend. The PR Completers continue to evidence a much lower tendency to recidivate than either of the other cohorts across all tracking periods. Both the male and female PR Completers exhibit a lesser tendency to recidivate than the Non-completers and Non-participants.

While the data show that overall females were less likely to re-offend, among PR Completers, there was no difference between males and females in terms of the likelihood of recidivism. However, when females did recidivate, they did so more quickly than their male counterparts, recidivating in an average of 387 days compared to the males who recidivated in an average of 661 days. Additionally, there was a trend for women to differ from men regarding rate of recidivism in the first year after the completion of Project Return. There were no differences between men and women regarding recidivism rate after the first year of tracking. These results combined suggest that although women in general are less likely to re-offend, this generalization is not true for PR Completers. In this group, women were no less likely to re-offend than men were overall. However, when only the first year is examined, in fact women are slightly more likely to re-offend, a finding that is substantiated by the quicker time to re-offend found in women. Thus, in contrast to most research, the larger number of women actually may have inflated the recidivism rate for Project Return, at least in the first year.

Figure Three: Recidivism Rates (males only)



Source: MCC Research

Clearly the hypothesis that PR Completers evidence a more favorable outcome due to larger numbers of women is not viable. All other criminological factors would suggest that PR Completers would be more likely to re-offend; the factors that are significantly different (type of offense and time served) indicate the PR Completers are more serious criminals, suggesting one would expect a less

favorable outcome. This was not the case. The data presented in this report show a lower recidivism rate among offenders who enroll in, and complete, a Project Return class. A logistic regression analysis indicates that three factors are related to recidivism in the sample as a whole: cohort, prior convictions (more suggests a less favorable outcome) and age (older indicates a more favorable outcome). The data provide evidence of only one demographic factor being significant in the PR Completer group (age). All other prior offending patterns or basic demographic characteristics of this group are unrelated to the PR Completers' lower recidivism rate. Some factors may actually have inflated the PR Completers' recidivism rate.

The data in this report present a picture of a group of ex-offenders committed to reintegration after incarceration, and a program that is able to provide the resources to make this reintegration possible. Aftercare programs like Project Return are instrumental in the ex-offender's transition from prison to the community. Far from revealing a more easily rehabilitated offender among the PR Completers, the data show that in some ways (history of offending, time spent in the system) the offenders who complete the Project Return program enter with more serious records than the Non-participants. It is widely accepted, and borne out in numerous studies, that individuals who have offended more frequently in the past are more likely to offend in the future (i.e. recidivate). A high frequency of prior offending is accepted by most criminal justice researchers as the best, albeit imperfect, predictor of recidivism. The data presented here provide no evidence of program participants with below average frequencies of prior offending.

OTHER RESEARCH: PUTTING THE EVALUATION IN CONTEXT

The following information is intended to provide added depth to the reader's understanding of the Project Return evaluation results and the program's approach by placing them in the context of current knowledge about recidivism and ex-offender programming. The reader must use caution in making direct comparisons between the recidivism rates presented in this report and the rates in the whole of recidivism research. For example, recidivism is defined in different ways by researchers (rearrest, reconviction, or re-incarceration), the offender populations studied vary widely (low risk versus high risk), the follow-up periods of studies often differ, and the study designs can be radically different (outcome measures, sample size, and the types of control groups used).

Studies of Recidivism Rates Among Ex-Offenders

An overview of offender recidivism rates is followed by a summary of recent findings in the ongoing effort to identify the types of services that seem to correlate with reduced recidivism.

- A study based on a sample of 16,000 persons released from prisons in 11 states in 1983 (*Recidivism of Prisoners Released in 1983, Beck and Shipley, 1989*) determined that 63 percent of those released were rearrested for a felony offense within three years and 41 percent were returned to prison or jail over the three-year period.
- A study conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Corrections of 3,557 offenders released from a variety of facility types (minimum through maximum security) in 1994 found an overall re-incarceration rate of 24 percent during the first year following release. Recidivism rates varied according to facility security level: 35 percent for maximum security, 28 percent for medium security, and 21 percent for minimum-security facilities.
- An overview of previously conducted research (*Probation and Parole: Public Risk and the Future of Incarceration Alternatives, Geerken and Hayes 1993*) provided the results of two

studies on recidivism (defined as re-incarceration) among individuals released on parole from the Louisiana state prison system. In a 1991 study, 25 percent of a sample of non-violent parolees were re-incarcerated within 12 months of release. In the second study (1993), 21 percent of parolees released were re-incarcerated within a 20 month period.

- In a large-sample study of federal parolees (*Recidivism of Young Parolees, Beck and Shipley, 1987*), it was found that 69 percent were rearrested for a serious offense within six years, and 49 percent of those paroled were returned to prison within six years.
- A study of a random sample of 200 parolees released from New Jersey state prisons found that 30 percent were re-convicted for a new offense within a three-year study period.
- The Texas Criminal Justice Policy Council studied system-wide recidivism rates in the state's adult and juvenile corrections systems and found that recidivism rates for offenders increased from 35 percent annually in 1984 to 48 percent in 1991.
- In a study of 965 offenders out on work release from Washington State prisons, researchers found that 30 percent of those released were re-incarcerated during a twelve-month follow-up period.

Some findings common to these studies are that a majority of ex-offenders recidivate during the first two years following release; property and drug offenders are more likely to recidivate than those committing crimes against persons; women recidivate less frequently than men; the rate of recidivism drops sharply after age 30; drinking and drug use are closely related to recidivism; and, the higher the parolees' education level the less likely they are to be re-incarcerated. Additionally, recidivism rates appear to be rising as property and drug offenders make up an increasing percentage of prison populations.

What Types of Programs Work?

In a commentary on the rehabilitation of criminal populations, *What Works? Questions and Answers About Prison Reform (1974)*, Robert Martinson concluded that rehabilitation programs had little positive effect on recidivism. His report is widely held as being responsible for lowering public and governmental support for rehabilitation efforts.

At the behest of congress, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) commissioned a study of more contemporary efforts to rehabilitate offenders. In the resulting report, *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising (1996)*, the NIJ found some bright spots, but concluded after a thorough review of ex-offender projects designed to lower recidivism through training, education and job placement that:

- it could find no programs that demonstrated (based on random assignment evaluations) the capability of decreasing recidivism for the broad spectrum of offender populations
- it is difficult to discern which elements of multifaceted programs actually correlate with positive outcomes
- most evaluations are not based on random assignment to programs and thus fail to control for the individual motivation factor leading to flawed evaluations.

But the NIJ report was not as bleak in its conclusions as was Martinson, finding that a secondary review (*Gerber and Fritsch 1993*) of several program evaluations confirms earlier positive findings that following release:

- offenders with jobs commit fewer crimes than unemployed offenders, and the higher the income of the offender the fewer crimes they commit

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B

Table Six: Recidivism Rates

<i>Tracking Period</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Recidivists</i>	<i>Recidivism Rate</i>
One Year	PR Completers	298	32	10.7%
	PR Non-completers	270	84	31.1%
	Non-participants	288	107	37.2%
Two Years	PR Completers	270	66	24.4%
	PR Non-completers	254	117	46.1%
	Non-participants	261	133	51.0%
Three Years	PR Completers	206	63	30.6%
	PR Non-completers	153	92	60.1%
	Non-participants	182	100	54.9%
Four Years	PR Completers	128	46	35.9%
	PR Non-completers	91	55	60.4%
	Non-participants	114	70	61.4%
Five Years	PR Completers	59	30	50.8%
	PR Non-completers	43	28	65.1%
	Non-participants	55	38	69.1%

Source: MCC Research

Table Seven: Subsequent Offense Types (recidivists)

<i>Cohort</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Property</i>	<i>Violent</i>	<i>Drug</i>	<i>Weapons/ Other</i>	<i>Parole Revocation</i>
PR Completers	101	28.7%	5.9%	34.7%	6.9%	23.8%
PR Non-completers	146	20.5%	15.1%	28.8%	3.4%	32.2%
Non-participants	190	23.2%	5.8%	22.1%	5.3%	43.7%

Source: MCC Research

Table Eight: Recidivism Rates (males only)

<i>Tracking Period</i>	<i>Cohort</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Recidivists</i>	<i>Recidivism Rate</i>
One Year	PR Completers	219	19	8.7%
	PR Non-completers	218	69	31.7%
	Non-participants	267	99	37.1%
Two Years	PR Completers	200	49	24.5%
	PR Non-completers	206	96	46.6%
	Non-participants	243	128	52.7%
Three Years	PR Completers	155	52	33.5%
	PR Non-completers	134	80	59.7%
	Non-participants	170	95	55.9%
Four Years	PR Completers	104	40	38.5%
	PR Non-completers	83	50	60.2%
	Non-participants	105	65	61.9%
Five Years	PR Completers	55	29	52.7%
	PR Non-completers	43	28	65.1%
	Non-participants	49	34	69.4%

Source: MCC Research